

ESTHER.

Introduction.

This book concerns a Jewish woman called Esther, a name which apparently comes from the Persian language meaning "star", there is a Hebrew equivalent name for Esther, "Hadassah," meaning "myrtle". We are not told who the actual writer is or their authority was for writing the material but the material the book contains reflects the conditions at the time. The book of Esther tells us about a Jewess who is married to a Gentile king and is used by God to protect the Jewish nation from destruction and so permit His plan for the world to continue. The interesting point is that though God is obviously controlling the situation, His name is never mentioned throughout the record, nor is there any mention of the religion of the Jews. This must remind us that wherever we may be, God is there and in control of any situation which involves His people, nothing will escape the hand of God, *"In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things, according to the counsel of His will."*

[Ephesians 1:11](#)

Why do we not find any mention of God? It is possibly because the behaviour of the Jewish nation had caused God displeasure and was being disciplined by Him, though it is very obvious that He is in full control of the situation and protecting His people.

Compare [Romans 8:28](#).

The story takes place in the Persian capital Shushan, during the reign of King Xerxes(Ahasuerus), who was better known by his Greek name, Xerxes, 486-465 B.C. The king involved is a very proud man and the story starts out listing who he was, where he was located and his area of power.

We find that he has arranged a feast for the princes of the area and his servants. During this feast he demonstrates his riches and seeks to get the honour of his position, this seems to take place over an hundred and eighty days. After this demonstration of power king Xerxes(Ahasuerus) holds a second feast for all those present in the palace in Shushan.

This feast and the location are described in,

[Esther 1:5-8](#).

Why do you think this display of power is material to this book? King Xerxes(Ahasuerus) should know about the warning from God found in,

[Proverbs 16:18](#).

The feasts were possible to prepare and plan the coming invasion of Greece.

All people, and especially those in power should remember that all authority comes from God,

[Romans 13:1](#).

That He is in complete and absolute control of all events world wide. Consider the following people in power and the result of their pride.

1) Pharaoh, Moses and the people of God in [Exodus 7:3-5](#).

2) Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon, [Daniel 3:1 to 4:36](#).

3) Belshazzar when he held a feast of pride and used objects from the temple of God. [Daniel 5:1-30](#).

4) King Herod at the birth of Jesus. [Matt 2:1-18](#).

5) Peter at the trial of Jesus. [Luke 22:54-62](#).

The king removes his queen.

[Esther 1:10 to 2:1](#).

The banquet has lasted seven days, the reason is not mentioned except it was to display the king's power. The writer records the splendour of the situation, gold, silver and valuable objects very obvious, unlimited wine, according to the writer, but seems to be based upon a personal belief, all were demonstrating the wealth of the king.

It appears that due to the number of people present the king's wife, Queen Vashti was holding her own feast with the various wives and ladies of the court. On the seventh day the king commanded that his wife comes to him so that he can show off her beauty to the people present but for some reason she refuses to come, *"therefore the king was furious, and his anger burned within him."* No reason is given or indicated for queen

Vashti's refusal, but it is a very important action, it publicly insults the authority of the king of Persia. Punishment had to follow, but this event allows the next stage for God to work.

It was common for "wise men" to be present, it was their duty to advise the king when required. *"Wise men who understood the times"* suggests that these were probably also astrologers. The seven wise men have Persian names, their spokesman being Memucan. He points out that the effect was not only a loss of respect for the king but all wives will now ignore their husbands, male power and supremacy was in danger throughout the empire. Therefore, the king must issue a decree to his empire that Vashti is removed from her position, and that in any household the husband is always in charge, this decree was to be *"according to laws of the Persians and the Medes, so that it could not be altered."* The family was also to use the language of the husband, this was a problem as there were many mixed marriages between nations of the time and was probably not therefore enforceable.

A new queen.

[Esther 2:1-18.](#)

The writer has recorded that *"after these things, when the wrath of King Xerxes(Ahasuerus) had subsided,"* suggesting a period of time has passed. verse 16 indicates that the following events were in the seventh year of the king's reign, that is three years after the banquet. The delay may have been due to the war with the Greeks, which took place about this time, 481-479 B.C.

The court officials did not want Vashti restored to the throne so they suggested *"Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king."* Officials were appointed to *"gather all the beautiful young virgins to Shushan from the provinces of his kingdom."* This must have caused great terror for any beautiful virgin in the realm, to be rounded up and taken away from their homes for the rest of their life as a concubine of the king. (A concubine was a woman, not married to the king but kept only for his pleasure.)

It is at this point that we meet Mordecai, a Jew, and his orphaned cousin Esther, who lived in Susa. Because of her beauty she was taken with the *"many young women gathered at Shushan the citadel, under the custody of Hegai."*

From the beginning Esther became a favorite with Hegai, the eunuch in charge of the harem. *"So he readily gave beauty preparations to her, besides her allowance. Then seven choice maidservants were provided for her from the king's palace, and he moved her and her maidservants to the best place in the house of the women."*

Esther has been instructed by Mordecai not to reveal that she was a Jewess, so Esther has to accept the preparations and the food given even though they may have broken the Jewish laws on food,

This was unlike Daniel, [Daniel 1:3-15.](#)

Mordecai wanted to make life as easy as possible for Esther, he was not allowed to enter the harem of the king but he found a way to monitor her situation, verse 11.

Verse 12: *"Each young woman's turn came to go in to King Xerxes(Ahasuerus), after she had completed twelve months' of preparation, according to the regulations for the women."* When it came Esther's turn, she makes no unreasonable requests except those she had been advised by Hegai, the king's eunuch, the king was delighted with her and *"loved Esther more than all the other women,"* the result is that the king chose her to be his new queen, this took place in 479 B.C.

The plot against the king Xerxes(Ahasuerus) life.

[Esther 2:21-23.](#)

Mordecai hears of a plot by two of the king's eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, he passes the information on to Esther who then tells the king, this results in the criminals being executed.

Haman threatened the Jews.

[Esther 3:1-15.](#)

Sometime later an Agagite (an Amalekite,

[1 Samuel 15:1-21](#))

Who was called Haman is promoted by King Xerxes(Ahasuerus) to be second in the kingdom. Mordecai, being a Jew, would have an hatred of the Amalekites and this could explain his attitude to Haman, refusing

to give him honour. It is interesting to note that the king has to issue a command that *"all the king's servants who were within the king's gate bowed and paid homage to Haman,"* this suggests that the appointment was also not popular with the court.

It was often a custom in these times for the Jews to honour their kings by bowing before them, see examples in,

[2 Samuel 14:4;](#)

[2 Samuel 18:28;](#)

[1 Kings 1:16.](#)

But during the Persian period the people were bowing as if the king was also a divine being. To a Jew this was a sin, only Jehovah was to be honoured as a divine being, Mordecai has to announce that he was a Jew to explain why he would not bow to Haman. To Mordecai revealing his nationality could be dangerous, but it was all part of God's plan for His people.

[Esther 3:7](#)

We have recorded that the following action by Haman occurred over four years after Esther had become queen, that would place the events about 474 B.C. Haman has by now realized that the Jews will never honour him as a divine being. Haman is obviously very proud and the attitude of Mordecai, makes him very angry, but he dare not attack Mordecai directly because of his relationship with the queen, so he decides to attack the Jews instead. By now he has become a favourite of the king and the king listens to his advice. He explains that *"a certain group of people"* were defying the laws made by the king, they should be destroyed and their property taken and become the property of the king. The Jews had become rich and that suggestion would get the king much riches and so would appeal very much to the king, Haman did not mention who were *"these certain people,"* neither did the king bother to ask. It is sad that pride and hatred could make a person so cruel to kill a nation, unfortunately it has happened in modern times.

There have always been objections to the Laws of the Jews by the Gentile Nations, but the Jews do not normally refuse to follow the laws of any nation they live in, unless it was against their own laws from God, so Haman's words *"they do not keep the king's laws."* was a lie, though he was right about their wealth, for example of their wealth see,

[Ezra 1:2-6.](#)

Haman had realized that king Xerxes was also very proud in his own abilities and position so Haman's deliberately used words that persuaded the king to issue an instruction that all *"these certain people,"* are to be killed and that Haman was prepared to pay *"ten thousand talents of silver"* to the people who did the work for the king and who would collect all the treasure of the Jews for the king. It is not clear where he would obtain this money, though he was probably very rich by now, due to his position. A modern equivalent would be many millions of pounds or dollars,

[Esther 3:10,11,](#)

King Xerxes(Ahasuerus) was not interested in taking any responsibility and gave his ring of authority to Haman, with this ring Haman has no limit on his power, it was an official equivalent to a signature of power, he could do anything he wanted in the king's name, some might feel that this was a dangerous action by the king.

Without delay the decree was drawn up and distributed to all parts of the empire. Haman had already set the date during April by the use of the astrologers and magicians, verse 7. They had cast lots to determine the day of destruction. The ancients had great faith in divination and casting lots, but God can control anything, and it was obvious that the chosen day, thirteenth day of the twelfth month, a year later, would allow God plenty of time to overrule the instruction.

[Esther 3:12-15.](#)

The letters were written on the *"thirteenth day of the first month,"* (17 April, 474 B.C.) and sent by a postal system which consisting of many men on horseback. A rider and horse are stationed at regular intervals along a road, passing on the mail from one to another rider until all of the empire is reached. This was a common practice in Persian times. As Haman and the king celebrate with a drink, the people of the city become concerned with the effect of the decree, there were many Jews in the city and probably had powerful friends,

(see [Esther 8:15.](#))

Esther makes a decision.

[Esther 4:1-17.](#)

Mordecai, on hearing the message, *"he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city."* Mordecai is sitting in the palace gate in sackcloth, he dare not go further as the king would not tolerate people in sorrow or grief. Esther sends him suitable clothes but he refused it as he needs to make Esther understand how serious the problem was.

Instead she makes contact with him through one of the king's eunuchs, who returns with a copy of the message that Haman had sent out. Mordecai also sent her a message, *"to enter the throne room and speak to the king about the situation."*

From early times, kings have refused entrance to their throne room to any uninvited person, this was to increase their power, position and protection. Anyone who wanted an audience with the king could make a request, but, Esther has not been called to the king for thirty days, this could indicate he had lost interest in her and it therefore could be dangerous for her to attempt to make contact with him. The only other possible action was to appear at the door of the throne room uninvited and hope he would be gracious to her, this was a very dangerous action for her.

Esther 4:13. *"Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews."* Mordecai reminds her that she was also in great danger from the decree, also she might find that God would punish her for failing His people. Mordecai knew the promises of God and possibly had realized that God had put Esther in her position to protect the Jewish people, *"Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"* verse 14.

Esther's first Banquet.

[Esther 5:9-14.](#)

Queen Esther prepares herself, then approaches the throne room, she is invited to approach the king who obviously finds pleasure at her being present and asks *"What is your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!"* She asks that the king, with Haman, attend a banquet with her the next day, then she will tell him of her request. The king is pleased to attend and Haman is full of joy, and returns home. On the way he passes Mordecai, who refused to bow to him, he is still full of hatred for Mordecai.

At home his wife and friends encourage him to get permission from the king to punish, to hang Mordecai. During the night he arranged for the construction of a gallows in the courtyard of his property.

The king does not sleep.

[Esther 6:1-14.](#)

We see the hand of God at work, *"That night the king could not sleep. So an official was commanded to bring the book of the records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king."* As the records are read out to the king he is reminded of the unrewarded Mordecai's loyalty incident which had saved his life from the two doorkeepers who had sought to kill the King.

[Esther 2:21-23.](#)

Haman has just arrived at the court early to ask for permission to hang Mordecai. The king summoned him into his presence for advice, *"What shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor?"* he is asked. Haman, full of pride, thinks that the king is referring to him,

(compare the warning of [Proverbs 16:18](#),

"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.").

Haman immediately starts to list the honours which would be appreciated by the people of that time, royal clothes, as worn by the king, a horse which the king had used and a crown on the head of the horse as a sign of position. *"Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!"*

The king then gives Haman instruction, *"do so for Mordecai the Jew who sits within the king's gate! Leave nothing undone of all that you have spoken."* The king had somehow found that Mordecai was Jewish, yet still not connected his recent decree to exterminate the Jews, because Haman had not identified the people involved. Haman carries out the king's instruction and then returns home.

The friends of Haman now act as wise men by pronouncing that he may be in serious trouble. *"If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish descent, you will not prevail against him but will surely fall"*

before him." They realized that the Jews are being protected.
Haman is now commanded to attend the second banquet of the queen.

Esther's second Banquet.

[Esther 7:1-10.](#)

Esther finally identified herself as a Jew to the king, she responds to his request. *"We who had been sold to be destroyed,"* If the Jews were sold as slaves then Esther would have remained silent, as this would be very profitable for the king, but the Jews were to be destroyed by his decree, which could not be changed, this decree would also include Esther, his queen.

"Who is he, and where is he that has filled his heart to do so?" asked the king, verse 5. The king had issued the decree so must now realize who was responsible for the evil act. Perhaps he deliberately did not turn to Haman so that Haman would realized the effect of his wicked action. Esther has carefully built up the evidence now replies to the king's question, *"The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman."*

The very angry king goes into the palace garden to gain control of his anger, meanwhile Haman pleads with Esther for mercy, he has realized that his future life is in the hands of a Jew. The king returns to the room, where we find Haman has fallen at the feet of Esther, *"Will he even force the queen before me in the house?"* asks the king.

"Haman are you now attacking my wife in front of me?" This was not a question but a command to carry out the execution. The covering of the head was a common way to signify the coming action of execution.

It is possible that the people there had listed the terrible acts by Haman, then finally Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, pointed out the gallows in Haman's house. The king ordered them to be used to hang Haman.

The new decree.

[Esther 8:1-17.](#)

King Ahasuerus(Xerxes) gave Queen Esther the house of Haman and because she had told the king she was a Jew, she was able to tell him that Mordecai was her cousin and guardian. Having already honoured Mordecai, the king is very pleased to pass on the ring he had previously given to Haman and the authority which came with it.

Even though Haman had now been removed from power the decree to destroy the Jews still exists and cannot be cancelled under the Persian laws, the task for Esther is still not complete.

Esther was desperate to stop the death of her people, so she approaches the king again. The king, anxious to prove his love for Esther, responds *"You yourselves write a decree concerning the Jews, as you please, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's signet ring; for whatever is written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet ring no one can revoke."* He personally cannot cancel his first decree under the Medes and Persian rules, so he has given her and Mordecai the power to issue a counter decree, which was just as irreversible as Haman's decree. This decree is written and sent out to the empire.

The decree message. [Esther 8:11-14](#) was in four parts,

- 1) The Jews were to gather together in groups by the date set by Haman.
- 2) They were to defend themselves.
- 3) They were to kill anyone who attacked them.
- 4) They were to take any spoil or possessions of the attackers.

The Jews were full of joy and the people of the empire had great respect and fear of the Jewish nation and a few even became (proselyte)Jews.

The Jews are triumphant.

[Esther 9:1 to 10:3](#)

When the day arrived, March 7, 473 B.C., the Jews gathered in groups in the cities where they were able to defend themselves, assisted by the government officials *"because of the fear of Mordecai,"* *"No one could withstand them."* In Shushan, five hundred men were killed including the ten sons of Haman. The king at the end of the day asked what she wanted, and she requested a further twenty four hours for the Jews in Shushan to protect themselves, possibly she had heard of a plot to attack the next day as the Mordecai decree only mentioned for the Jews to defend themselves for one day. This was agreed and a further three hundred, who hated the Jews, were killed. In the provinces of the empire seventy-five thousand enemies were killed, the

Jews did not take advantage of their right to collect the spoil, showing the motive to be pure.

Compare [Daniel 6:23-28](#).

On the fourteenth, after the battles, the Jews in the provinces had a day of *"gladness and feasting, as a holiday, and for sending presents to one another."* while Shushan celebrated on the fifteenth.

Mordecai has kept a record of the events and now sends out a letter to all the Jews to not have two separate days but one single holiday lasting the two days and be observed as the Feast of Purim.

Presumably after a period, another letter is sent by Esther and Mordecai to the Jews, telling them to observe and remember the days of delivery by God, to make it a national custom.

King Ahasuerus(Xerxes).

[Esther 10:1-3](#).

King Ahasuerus(Xerxes) died in 465 B.C., the writer now looks back and records the power and wealth of this king and the elevation and relationship with the Jew, Mordecai.

It appears that God has rewarded the king for his action.